# Radical Chic? Subaltern Realism: A Rejoinder

## *Michael Barnett*

Over the years, Mohammed Ayoob has been an important and sometimes iconoclastic voice on the state of international relations theory. He has argued, vigorously and convincingly, that mainstream international relations (IR) theory exhibits traces of theoretical imperialism. Scholars of international relations neglected the international history of the Third World because of the implicit presumption that the experiences of the Great Powers and the West were representative of the world. There was the rare moment when a scholar of international relations theory extended these models to the Third World, but these moments were few and far between. Moreover, this encounter between theory and the Third World always seemed to leave theory vindicated and the Third World marginalized: either the history of the Third World was distorted to make it conform to the theory, or the gap between theory and practice was blamed on the Third World's "peculiar" characteristics that immediately transformed it into a methodological outlier. At best the history of the Third World could be explained with theoretical models that derived from the international relations of the West; at worst the Third World was ignored altogether. Mainstream IR tended to exile the Third World from international history and international relations theory.

Ayoob has confronted this theoretical imperialism by calling for theoretical decolonization, which has both spatial and temporal dimensions. The mainstream must "see" the Third World. To "see" the Third World means to recognize the inherent limitations of mainstream IR theory for explaining Third World security patterns, and to recognize these limitations not as a mark of the Third World's strangeness, but as a weakness of mainstream theory. IR theories, as Ayoob argues, must be able to explain the "majority of conflicts" in the global system, and the failure of the mainstream to pass this test means that alternatives must be sought. Such alternatives must become more self-consciously historical.

This is why he champions the epistemological commitments of the English School and historical sociology. The English School emphasizes the historical evolution of international society and the creation of the Third World, which was a product of this international society and continues to exist within it. Historical sociology recognizes how the Western state system was a product of centuries of war making and state making and how they shaped European security patterns and practices; the Third World is probably going through a similar process. If Western and Third World security patterns differ, it is because of the global historical context in which the Third World was created and continues to develop. This historical context helps to explain why illegitimate Third World states are as concerned with internal as with external security and are constantly attempting to defend themselves against Western encroachments. For many, including myself, Ayoob's insights regarding the relationship between international relations theory and the Third World—including the nature of North-South relations, global inequalities, how "globalization" is an ongoing historical process, how global expansion has shaped the international relations of the Third World, the need of IR theory to incorporate the Third World, and how the Third World is important case material for theory building—have been refreshing, exciting, and convincing.

Although I continue to admire and agree with much of what Ayoob writes here and elsewhere, I have several reservations about his essay, "Inequality and Theorizing in International Relations." Specifically, I urge him to take a fuller inventory of the discipline; I am not persuaded that subaltern realism, as currently formulated, represents a distinct or superior alternative for explaining security patterns; I find that his perspective has strong residues of the "dominant paradigm" that he rues; and I worry that what he offers as a manifesto for intellectual pluralism can be seen as an accidental defense of the current theoretical hegemony and the political status quo.

In the first part of my response, I evaluate Ayoob's representation of the discipline and the explanatory merits of his subaltern realism. Briefly, my concern is that his presumption that neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism have a hegemonic hold over the discipline leads him to neglect important theoretical developments in IR that have injected more theoretical pluralism into the discipline. Although the emperor still is clothed, his slightly tarnished crown sits tilted on his head, his cape is missing buttons and is stained, and there are many in the crowd who hoot that the emperor is barely dressed for the occasion. Ayoob's failure to recognize this disciplinary development makes the "mainstream" appear more muscular than it is. He offers his subaltern realism because it can provide a superior explanation of the majority of the world's conflicts. I am not sure that it does; I am not sure how we would know if it did; and I am not convinced that "realism" is doing much theoretical work.

In the second part of the essay, I evaluate Ayoob's shift from explanation to prescription. Specifically, he holds fast to the state and defends a sovereignty

defined by the principle of noninterference on the grounds that it is superior to the lurking alternatives and, supposedly, necessary if there is ever to be greater equality or a genuine global society. In short, as he darts between explanatory and normative theory, he preserves a centrality for the state—it represents the basis for theory building and for defending (his definition of) the subaltern in global politics. At the end of the day Ayoob's "radicalism" appears to be a prime candidate for the theoretical and political mainstream.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE CURRENT STATE OF THE ART

Ayoob assumes that the discipline of international relations is dominated by a mainstream comprised of neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism. Yet his harangue against American-style international relations ignores important theoretical developments and innovations that have occurred since he first offered his critique over a decade ago. Although the discipline of IR continues to have an American core and his views are still slightly heterodox in some quarters, a fuller inventory of the discipline might alter his assessment of the field and buoy his spirits.

Before the end of the Cold War there were important signs of growing theoretical pluralism.[1] The end of the Cold War expanded the growing divisions in the discipline and produced a decade of vibrant developments. Because of its commitment to rationalism and materialism, mainstream IR theory was not well equipped either to explain the changing nature of state interests or to consider an international system where norms were anything more than constraining or regulating state behavior. These silences proved to be fertile ground for scholars working under the banner of constructivism; they explored how variations in state preferences could be explained by variations in national identity and how international normative structures not only constrain but also constitute states.

Neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism each has important insights into the nature of globalization, but they are hardly alone, sharing the podium with Gramscians, neo-Marxists, world systems theorists, liberals, feminists, and so on. The International Studies Association's annual meetings are hardly a bastion of neorealist or neoliberal institutionalist thinking; the program features panels on the English School, feminism, critical international relations theory, constructivism, and postmodernism. Although mainstream scholarship still dominates

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[1]See, for example, Kalevi J. Holsti, *The Dividing Discipline: Hegemony and Diversity in International Theory* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1985); Alexander Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations," *International Organization* 41, No. 3 (1987), pp. 335–370; Yosef Lapid, "The Third Debate: On the Prospects of International Theory in a Post-Positivist Era," *International Studies Quarterly* 33, No. 3 (1989), pp. 235–254.

the major journals in the field, it is no longer an exclusive club. Indeed, the fiftieth anniversary issue of *International Organization* predicted that the coming debate in IR would be between constructivism and rationalism. IR is still a discipline in every sense of the term, but it is not the same discipline it was a decade ago.

Ayoob cannot justify his restrictive survey on the grounds that these other theories have failed to direct their attention to the central questions of war and peace. Consider the case of constructivist international relations, which the mainstream has taken seriously precisely because it has demonstrated its ability to address central security issues. The contributions to *The Culture of National Security* demonstrated how normative and not material structures shaped important outcomes in security politics.[2] Several scholars have noted the presence of pockets of security communities in world politics.[3] Bruce Cronin argues that a thin version of international community explains security practices in the Concert of Europe.[4] Scholars have demonstrated convincingly the significance of nonmaterial forces for explaining the end of the Cold War.[5] Nina Tannenwald provocatively investigates the causal significance of the nuclear taboo.[6] Evolving patterns of military intervention hardly can be explained without reference to changes in the legal principles and normative structures in world politics.[7] Jutta Weldes demonstrates the social construction of national interests and its implication for understanding the Cuban missile crisis.[8]

Constructivism's theoretical reach extends past the West and into the Third World. In my previous work, I argued that the normative structure of Arabism decisively shaped patterns of conflict and cooperation in the Arab world.[9]

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[2] Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

[3] John Ruggie, *Winning the Peace: America and World Order in the New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds., *Security Communities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[4] Bruce Cronin, *Community under Anarchy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

[5] Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse, eds., *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Dan Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[6] Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[7] Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Force* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, forthcoming).

[8] Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

[9] Michael Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

Amitav Acharya shows the importance of bringing in state-society and trans-
national relations to explain regionalism in Southeast Asia (and does so in a
way highly congenial to constructivist arguments).[10] Marc Lynch investigates
how national identity helps to explain Jordan's foreign policy choices in the
Gulf War.[11]

The "mainstream" no longer possesses a monopoly on how to think about
central problems of war and peace, and those occupying the center stage feel
increasingly pressed to consider constructivist alternatives as they assess the
robustness of their theories. This raises an important aside that bears mention-
ing if only because Ayoob's essay, in my view, concedes too much ground to the
"mainstream." According to Ayoob, a principal reason why the Third World
and the West differ in their security patterns concerns the nature of the state.

In the West, centuries of state making have produced relatively legitimate
and coherent Western states. This is why Western states elevate external over
internal security. In contrast, global forces have created, in Robert Jackson's
felicitous terminology,"quasi-states"—states that possess positive sovereignty
but are lacking empirical sovereignty.[12] Because Third World states are still
states-in-the-making, they are as concerned with internal as with external secu-
rity (probably more so because the norm of sovereignty implies that these states
are more likely to be recognized as legitimate by other states than by their own
societies).

If I interpret Ayoob correctly, the logical implication is that if Third World
states were legitimate and stable, then they would produce security patterns
that resembled patterns identified in the West. If so, the claim concedes too
much ground (and the Western flank) to a materialism that fails to recognize the
centrality of normative structures (and not just norms as an external constraint
as posited by the English School). During the last decade, scholars of inter-
national relations have demonstrated how neorealism and neoliberal institution-
alism fail to explain important security patterns and developments in the West
and have offered compelling theoretical alternatives with empirical tests.[13] I

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[10] Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

[11] Marc Lynch, *State Interests and Public Spheres* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[12] Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[13] See Paul Schroeder: *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (Ox-
ford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1994), and "Historical Reality vs. Neo-Realist Theory," *In-
ternational Security* 19, No. 1 (1994), pp. 108–148; Colin Elman, Miriam Fendius Elman,
and Paul Schroeder, "History vs. Neorealism: A Second Look," *International Security*
20, No. 1 (1995), pp. 182–195; and Rodney Bruce Hall, *National Collective Identity: So-
cial Constructs and International Systems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

worry that Ayoob's statist ontology and commitment to a thin understanding of international norms lead him to overlook both other limitations of the "mainstream" and attractive alternatives.

Ayoob claims that "subaltern realism" represents a compelling alternative to either neorealism or neoliberal institutionalism for explaining "the majority of the conflicts" in the international system. The mainstream is unable to "explain the origins of the majority of conflicts in the international system"; explain the "behavior of the majority of states in the international system"; connect the relationship between domestic and international order; or "demonstrate the illusory nature of the broader liberal agenda." Presumably, Ayoob believes that his approach is superior in these critical areas. It is also important to note that subaltern realism aspires toward both explanatory and prescriptive theory (and he floats back and forth between the two in problematic ways), but for the moment I want to focus on its projected explanatory power and leave until later its normative implications.

Ayoob claims that subaltern realism offers a powerful explanation of interstate conflict because it marries "essential realism," the English School's understanding of international society, historical sociology's concern with the relationship between state formation and security practices, and Hobbesian concerns with domestic order. As I try to simplify the nature of his argument, it seems that "realist" propositions have little explanatory power. Ayoob argues that his theory has realist roots because it "accepts the three fundamental elements of 'essential realism'—statism, survival, and self-help." A wicked debate continues among realists regarding what constitutes its core.[14] I am less concerned with whether Ayoob has identified the DNA of realism and more interested in scrutinizing how distinctive these claims are and how much causal role they play in his argument. Although realists disagree about much, they generally agree that the state is the unit of analysis and is a unitary, rational actor; in a condition of anarchy, the state must follow the logic of self-help and be concerned with its power, security, and survival. From these assumptions, realists claim that they can derive some probabilistic propositions regarding the patterns of international politics.

Realists have attempted during the past decade to rescue realism from itself. That is, they have responded to a series of empirical anomalies by introducing auxiliary hypotheses that do not necessarily follow from the core assumptions. I will not comment on whether the introduction of these hypotheses represents the progression or degeneration of the realist research program, but realists are

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[14] For specific contributions to this debate, see Michael Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998); Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?" *International Security* 24, No. 2 (1999), pp. 5–55; and Benjamin Frankel, ed., *Roots of Realism* (Portland, Ore.: Frank Cass, 1996).

responding to the recognition that the system (material) structure apparently provides little leverage over state behavior.[15] Because this structure cannot account for the tremendous variation in the forms of international politics, the patterns of war and peace, and state responses to systemic threats and opportunities, those working within the realist tradition have introduced new assumptions and variables, including variations in state preferences, the distinction between offense and defense, the causal consequence of ideas, and the importance of misperception.

Ayoob's subaltern realism follows in this decade-long tradition of injecting auxiliary assumptions into realism to explain empirical anomalies. In particular, Ayoob attempts to explain a fairly significant anomaly—patterns of Third World conflict—by adding the critical variable of "domestic politics" as a source of state preferences and constraints. Because of domestic instabilities, Third World regimes are obsessed with survival, frequently see the international environment as a normative and material resource in their quest for survival, and will oftentimes evaluate changes in the international system in terms of whether and how they affect their chances for regime survival. I have two questions. First, is it realist? Not to my mind. For many realists, one of realism's distinctive features is that it brackets domestic politics.[16] Moreover, there is nothing distinctively realist about the claim that states pursue security. Most theories of international relations acknowledge such a basic concern. And, Third World governments are concerned with regime and not state security. Ayoob makes clear that this is not a semantic quibble but an important conceptual issue. I agree with Ayoob but also believe that this claim cannot be derived from traditional realist assumptions.

Second, how much causal primacy is given to domestic politics? My hunch is quite a bit. In Ayoob's theory, traditional realist variables play a tiny role, and causal primacy is given to domestic-level variables. I believe that Ayoob is making an important theoretical contribution, but it is a theoretical contribution that should be seen not as a friendly amendment but rather as an alternative to realism. Yet he seems to advance the proposition that there is a relationship between "stateness" and foreign policy practices and that the nature of these practices is contingent on both the phase of state making and the nature of international society. His approach is highly stylized and is not couched in any testable formulation. At the most basic level, what is needed is a theoretical statement that connects one class of phenomena with another; a derivation of some empirical statements from that theoretical statement; and the specifica-

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[15] For the debate, see Colin Elman and John Vasquez, eds., *Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate?* (New York: St. Martin's Press, forthcoming).

[16] See Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, No. 1 (1998), pp. 144–172.

tion of a causal mechanism that indicates precisely how the observed effects are exerted.[17]

In short, Ayoob's approach cannot be tested because he never really goes beyond the broadest generalizations; for instance, there is a relationship between international and domestic order. Until he specifies more, it will be impossible to test his theory and to determine whether, as he claims, it is in fact superior to the mainstream. As it stands, one of the virtues of the mainstream theories is that we can, as Ayoob does, determine their empirical accuracy.

What about the "subaltern" in subaltern realism? Apparently, it is subaltern because it draws from the experiences of the weak in world politics. In an important respect, Ayoob follows the spirit of "subaltern studies," for he, too, attempts to give a theoretical space to the dominated actors, allowing them to be a "sovereign subject of history." [18] But I am not sure that his perspective is subaltern in any other respect. I do not see any conscious attempt to wrestle with the various epistemological, historical, and social theoretic debates that have unfolded in this collective. Moreover, in contrast to recent subaltern writings that critically analyze the discursive and hegemonic power of the postcolonial state in relationship to its citizens, Ayoob nearly celebrates the postcolonial state and completely excludes the citizens of these states.[19] This is not a trivial move. His framework highlights the concerns of regimes that find themselves beset by security challenges and marginalizes the societal groups that are now constructed as a "threat." In this light, Ayoob's definition of the "subaltern" transposes the objects of concern from the experiences of everyday life, peasants, and the disenfranchised within colonial states to the postcolonial states, which are now obsessed with preserving an order that benefits them.

Finally, his appropriation of the "subaltern" appears to be less a theoretical than a discursive move that is designed to generate authority for his claims. Ayoob claims that his approach is to be valued, not only because it provides greater explanatory power, but also because it is generated from outside the hegemonic West. I have already raised doubts about its proven explanatory capacity, but I now worry that Ayoob is claiming to represent the Third World. As Ayoob rightly notes in his essay, we must recognize the relationship between knowledge and power and that knowledge claims can privilege some actors and

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[17] Arthur Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[18] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 102. Also see Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[19] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, pp. 41–42.

silence others. Not only do I presume that there is no singular Third World experience, but I also worry about a theory that so clearly elevates the perspective and interests of the Third World regime and marginalizes the knowledge claims of the society that the regime now constructs as a threat. Would these societies agree with Ayoob's characterization that the Third World regimes represent the true subalterns in world politics?

## Ayoob's World

Many conceptions of the IR discipline make claims regarding what the task of international relations theory should be. Such a discursive move invariably involves drawing boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Ayoob lays down his own conception of what a theory of international relations must accomplish and therefore invariably erects enclosures. Ayoob envisions the discipline as follows:

> Any perspective that claims to provide an intellectually satisfactory explanation in the field of IR must be able to explain adequately the behavior of the primary units constituting the international system. Furthermore, the perspective must explain adequately issues of war and peace. To retain its significance, the perspective must be able to explain why the majority of conflicts when and where they do occur.

Ayoob ironically places his boundaries in almost the identical location staked by the "mainstream." He wants to safeguard the ontological priority of the state and the discipline's focus on security issues. Furthermore, his defense of the state extends from the ontological to the prescriptive playing field, cleaving to the state not only for its explanatory power, but also because it represents the best hope for justice in an infinitely conflict-prone and inherently unjust world.

Although there are various reasons to proffer a state centrism, like any ontological commitments it has its own costs and blind spots. Many international relations scholars have been struggling to move away from the state centrism of the discipline to recognize how the international system is populated by actors other than states and how these nonstate actors are central for understanding important developments and outcomes in international politics. All this is well known. What is less well known is that the very same historical sociology that Ayoob views as a theoretical ally has become increasingly uncomfortable with its statist roots.

Historical sociology's statism stems not from the anarchy problematique but rather from sociology's conception of "society." Historical sociology, like much of sociology, famously envisioned the outer possibility of society as demarcated and delineated by the territorial boundaries of the state. Consequently, historical sociologists have tended to introduce systemic variables and transnational forces in an ad hoc and unsatisfactory way, and typically only when these forces influence domestic outcomes. Nevertheless, state centrism is not a necessary property of historical sociology. Those international relations scholars

who are interested in historical sociology need not employ only its state-centric versions (despite the common charge that a Weberian-oriented historical sociology leads to a neorealist or state-centric position).[20]

Some historical sociologists are developing nonstate-centric understandings of global politics. Specifically, various historical sociologists see society as existing at the transnational and global levels; depart from the international/national duality; and examine the actors that populate that global society, the authority that they possess, and how their intensifying dynamics and linkages serve to transform the constitutive character of global politics.[21]

Consider Michael Mann's recent statements.[22] His modified network approach identifies the possibility of several analytically distinct spaces of interaction, the organizational forms those interactions produce, and the different resources and powers that those organizations possess. Specifically, Mann argues that there are five "socio-spatial" networks—local (subnational), national (state), international (geopolitical), transnational (macroregional), and global. These networks are populated by actors that possess different resources and (implicitly) interact according to different organizing principles. Mann reminds international relations scholars that while the contemporary international system gives significant advantages to states, there are other arenas where the playing field is leveled; that there are also normative forces that constrain state actors; and that the state system does not define global politics or preclude nonstate actors from bringing about historical change. Mann and others have moved away from statism because of the recognition that it does not provide leverage over important empirical outcomes.

Ayoob's statism cannot be defended on the grounds that it necessarily offers a better way of thinking about Third World security issues.[23] Ayoob defends his statism on the grounds that "the state, as the exclusive repository of legitimate

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[20] See the collection of essays in John M. Hobson and Stephen Hobden, eds., *International Relations and Historical Sociology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[21] Martin Albrow, *The Global Age: State and Society beyond Modernity* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 1996); Martin Shaw, *Theory of the Global State: Globality as an Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[22] Michael Mann, "Has Globalization Ended the Rise of the Nation-State?" *Review of International Political Economy* 4, No. 3 (1997). Also see his *Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), ch. 1.

[23] Interestingly, Ayoob would probably find support from Stephen Walt and others who continue to push a state-centric view of security studies. See Stephen Walt, "The Renaissance of Security Studies," *International Studies Quarterly* 35, No. 2 (1991), pp. 211–239. For important dissents, see Keith Krause and Michael Williams, "Broadening the Agenda of Security Studies: Politics and Methods," *Mershon International Studies Review* 40, No. 2 (1996), pp. 229–254, and Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

authority, is now the sole and indispensable provider of order within territorially organized polities." Yet later he notes the existence of "competing 'authorities' in multiethnic and multireligious societies that make up most of the Third World." Although the state-as-unitary-actor assumption might be defended, not on empirical but rather on predictive grounds, Ayoob concedes that to understand the nature of Third World security dilemmas requires recognizing the distinction between the state and the regime, the fractured nature of Third World societies, and the fragmented nature of authority relations.[24] Moreover, if, according to Ayoob, IR theory should be explaining the "large majority of conflicts" that occur at any time and if those conflicts are not interstate but rather intrastate, then why cling to a state-centric definition of the discipline that seems to provide little explanatory value? Finally, who is the object of security—the state, regime, society, ethnic group, or individual?

Ayoob defends the state not only on theoretical but also on normative grounds. He frets that an unjust world is about to become even more so because the norm of sovereignty that has been the Third World's chief defense organization against Western encroachments is being unraveled by power-seeking states and well-meaning human rights activists. Sovereignty has been nothing short of a security regime for many Third World states, generating a normative shield against the intrusions of more powerful Western states. International forces are taking potshots at that shield, but the sum total of these sorties is to alter the "standard of civilization" and to shift the "fulcrum" of the system "from the protection of sovereigns to the protection of peoples."[25] Western states, confident in their legitimacy, treated this shift as progress while many Third World states became visibly uncomfortable at taking a standardized test that they would probably fail and where failure implies becoming a ward of the international community.

Ayoob's objections to these developments are threefold. First, as bad as the sovereignty system is, it is better than the imaginable alternatives. The rationale for any weakening of the sovereignty regime is surely premised on the grounds that it would lessen inequality. But it is not particularly clear that Western states and nonstate actors are committed to reducing inequality or have the wherewithal to reduce those inequalities. While the sovereignty regime might not promote equality, it might at the least reduce growing inequalities. Along these lines, Benedict Kingsbury wrote: "The traditional sovereignty system is flawed,

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[24] These observations are developed in Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1995). For other statements to this effect, see Christopher Clapham, *Africa in the International System: The Politics of Survival* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Brian Job, ed., *The Third World Security Dilemma* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991).

[25] W. Michael Reisman, "Sovereignty and Human Rights in International Law," *American Journal of International Law* 84, No. 4 (1990), p. 872.

and will continue to be stretched and strained. But for the time being it remains a realistic system for the management of enduring inequalities, and of other pathologies of the international system of law and politics, than any of the alternatives on offer." [26]

There is no reason to advocate change for the sake of change, and there is every reason to assess what might be the intended and unintended consequences of such a major normative change. But it is important to continue to "stretch" the sovereignty system where appropriate. To do otherwise is to reify the sovereignty norms, to fail to recognize that as social constructions they are always being created and recreated, to treat these norms as imposing negative and not positive duties, and to allow the Kosovos, the Rwandas, and the Bosnias to go unanswered because of a fetishization of sovereignty. Sovereignty should be stretched to make sure that governments do not have a license to kill.

Ayoob's second concern is that loosening the norms of sovereignty represents nothing more than a power play by Western states dressed in the name of progress. The West believes that it is on a mission from God and it possesses the resources to undertake this holy crusade, and it just so happens that it only travels to Jerusalem when it believes that it will benefit strategically or economically. (Significantly, it is at this moment that Ayoob cites approvingly American IR scholars like Stephen Krasner.) For good reason, many Third World governments do not want to give the West a license to intervene and do not trust that the West will be judicious and fair in applying these new sovereignty norms. Yet the response to these highly legitimate concerns need not be their wholesale rejection. Instead, it is possible to develop various international forums such as the United Nations as a place for both substantive and procedural legitimacy—to provide a collective determination over the legitimate goals and decision-making procedures. This, of course, has been U.N. secretary-general Kofi Annan's answer to these concerns. [27]

Third, Ayoob implicitly argues that the only way in which these illegitimate states will become less so is if they are given the breathing space to develop on their own more consensually based domestic compacts. He does not indicate exactly how such compacts are to be struck. He seems to put his faith in the

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[26] Benedict Kingsbury, "Sovereignty and Inequality," in Andrew Hurrell and Ngaire Woods, eds., *Inequality, Globalization, and World Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 94. A related defense offered by some in the English School is that any change in the sovereignty game is to be repudiated because it is likely to create system instability. For a review of this literature, see Nicholas Wheeler, *Saving Strangers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), ch. 1.

[27] Although Ayoob writes as if he is giving the consensus position among Third World states, this is hardly true. General Assembly debates, resolutions, and speeches show that many, if not most, are open to some qualified changes on the sovereignty regime.

Third World leaders that are engaged in state making and explicitly argues that any outside interference is both unwelcome and counterproductive. He is aware that such a rhetorical move creates an alliance between his normative theory and authoritarian leaders that oppress their people in the quest for "domestic order." He puts up a valiant defense, but I am not convinced by his arguments. I see no reason to presume that because Western state formation was violent, Third World state formation also must be so. It is one thing to argue that some amount of violence and repression accompanies most state-formation projects, but quite another to insist that any level is functionally necessary and therefore normatively justifiable. Not only is this morally objectionable, but it also represents historical determinism at its most teleological and simplest. Charles Tilly, Robert Jackson, and others note that Third World state formation will be different from Western state formation precisely because Third World state formation is occurring in a different historical context.[28] Ayoob recognizes this but fails to recognize the theoretical and normative implications of his argument: there is no historically invariant path toward state formation, and Third World state formation might demonstrate distinctively violent and pathological tendencies as a consequence.

Moreover, Ayoob is dangerously close to insisting that the choice is either state repression or state implosion. This is a false choice that invariably generates a nearly heroic role for state repression. It also is highly reminiscent of Samuel Huntington's claim that it is not the kind of government but its degree that matters. Furthermore, I am less sanguine about the ability to distinguish between "state repression for the purposes of consolidation of state authority" and predatory behavior. Indeed, Ayoob seems to give political backing to any or all political repression so long as, in his judgment, it is carried out in the name of state formation. This is why he comes to the defense of the Turkish government in its repression of the Kurds. I wonder how the Taliban, who showed little evidence of "predatory" behavior according to Ayoob's definition but who seemed intent on "state formation," would fare under this formulation. I suspect quite well. Finally, Ayoob demonstrates much more concern for authoritarian leaders than he does for the "subaltern."

It is important to emphasize that Ayoob understates a major reason why many Third World regimes are opposed to change: they have a personal stake in the continuation of unconditional sovereignty. Those governments that have relied on coercion rather than consent to generate domestic stability are now under more international and domestic pressure to trade in their guns for ballots. Human rights organizations and transnational activists began attempting to shame Third World governments into compliance with various international

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[28] Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990* (Cambridge, U.K.: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Robert Jackson, *Quasi-States*.

norms and to lobby international organizations and powerful Western states to impose sanctions on those who continue to abuse their citizens. Emboldened by the international winds of change, domestic opposition groups began to push for domestic reforms and to insist that regimes make good on their "liberal" talk. After all, not everyone in the Third World is as outraged by the development of these international norms because not everyone in the Third World stands to lose by their instantiation.

Ultimately, Ayoob's subaltern realism represents less a leveling of the political and theoretical playing field than its propagation.